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More Theory for Mortuary Research of the Viking World

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This themed journal issue provides many examples of ways forward in the study of death and memory in the Viking world. While all contributions demonstrate that there are exciting new ways to study remains from funerary contexts that focus on different forms of citation involving material culture and monuments, this article will very briefly discuss dimensions that have not been addressed here. Specifically, it showcases how the mortuary citations approach can also use post-humanist theory for further development and exploration of mortuary practices in the Viking world. Although short, this article discusses rune stones, particularly rune stones with kuml inscriptions, which I have examined elsewhere. The term kuml appears on contemporary rune stones; it refers to different material entities such as rune stones, mounds/cairns, and other standing stones. The being and becoming of kuml is briefly discussed through the concepts of intra-action and agential cuts championed by Karen Barad.

Keywords: Viking period, rune stones, *kuml*, Barad, intra-action, agential cuts

INTRODUCTION

This special issue of the *European Journal of Archaeology* seeks to introduce and present novel theoretical perspectives and new methodologies in the study of mortuary practices and commemoration. Although its specific focus is on the Viking world, which here includes the Nordic countries and areas affected by the Viking diaspora, the theories and methods employed in this issue may of course have a resonance well beyond the case studies presented. Equally, recent theoretical and methodological discussions in archaeology in general may be further explored in the study of mortuary practices and commemoration between the eighth to the eleventh centuries AD in the Viking world. Specifically I am thinking about further explorations of what might be glossed as post-humanist theories. These include, for instance, neo-materialistic thoughts and theories embracing ideas that the material culture is much more than just representative, that it is in itself active and non-static. These

theories have been termed non-representational or more-than-representational theories (e.g. Alberti et al., 2013; Alberti & Marshall, 2014; for additional references and a recent compilation of previous work within these theoretical fields, including symmetrical and relational archaeology, see Fowler & Harris, 2015: 127–29).

For archaeologists, neo-materialism and more-than-representational theories in some respects offer ways to move beyond the linguistic turn in which material culture is read, thus recognising the agency of materials in their own right; this should however not be accomplished by slipping into physical determinism. These theories have fruitfully highlighted how the conventional binary separation of matter and meaning has limited our understanding of material and materiality, their being and becoming, and how neglecting the affective dimensions of material culture has meant excluding the events and practices that material culture took part in. They have also enabled us to question the ontological divide between non-human others and humans and have drawn attention to how relations between humans and non-humans are configured. With an interest in the ontology of things, the prevailing anthropocentrism, i.e. where the human construction of meaning is at the centre of attention, can be questioned.

The question of how matter comes to matter has been discussed at length by Karen Barad (2003; 2007). She explains that it is not possible to gain knowledge by standing outside the world, but emphasises that ‘we are *of* the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming. The separation of epistemology from ontology is a reverberation of a metaphysics that assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse’ (Barad, 2003: 829).

Instead of departing from this assumption, Barad suggests categories such as subject and object are mutually constituted, and that they are only relationally distinct. They intra-act, they are mutually constituted, and they do not exist as individual components. She thus draws our attention to the performative intra-action between objects, bodies, discourses, and other non-human material things (Barad 2003, 814). Categories such as these intra-act as elements of a greater whole, where the world, when understood from within, is transformed in the process (Barad, 2011: 147). In order to understand how specific intra-actions matter, she argues for the study of practices of knowing in being, that she names onto-epistem-ology (Barad, 2003: 829). From a detailed study of physicist Niels Bohr’s sometimes implicit ontological views, she develops an agential realist ontology. Her agential realist ontology is an account of the performative production of material bodies (Barad, 2003: 814). Material bodies are produced through apparatuses while at the same time the phenomena are produced. The

apparatuses of bodily production and the phenomena produced have a causal relationship that is the result of agential intra-action. To Barad, phenomena are ‘neither individual entities, nor mental impressions, but entangled material practices’ (2007: 334) and further ‘*phenomena are the ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting “components.”*’ (2003: 815, emphasis in the original).

When Barad talks about bodies they are to be understood in a general sense, and thus not only refer to human bodies, but also to non-human bodies as in, for instance, things. Barad is interested in how bodies become specific bodies. Once again, her answer is that bodies do not have innate properties, but that the properties of a body (that are usually used to describe, and hence give, a body an identity) are the result of, or effects of phenomena. The effects are co-produced simultaneously by the matter (body) itself and the apparatuses of bodily production, that is, through practice.

Importantly, when both matter and meaning are considered as materialised through practice, both human and non-human bodies may be treated as ontological equivalents (Alberti & Marshall, 2014: 22, 26). This means concretely for archaeologists that there is no ontological gap between, say, a human skeleton and a ceramic vessel. Both are archaeological bodies, created and materialised through practice. If we follow this train of thought a Viking-age grave’s materiality and its embodied qualities, for instance, are constantly in relation to its meaning and place (see Fowler & Harris, 2015, referring to the Neolithic West Kennet tomb in England). What would such a position bring to a study of mortuary citations, defined here as practices, materials, materialities, and spatialities that create mnemonic references to other things, places, peoples, and times? This short contribution provides possible answers to this question by applying Barad’s concept of intra-action and agential cut to standing, inscribed stones (rune stones) from the Late Viking Age in Scandinavia.

RUNE STONES

Rune stones are generally described as memorial stones, that is, stones raised in memory of someone (e.g. Jesch, 2005; Stoklund, 2005; see Köster, 2014 who emphasises that rune stones need not only be raised in memory of dead people, but for the living). A runic inscription can be found on a raised and/or transported worked stone or else carved onto boulders or rock outcrops found *in situ*. Although starting in the Migration period (AD 400–550), the flowering of the rune stone phenomenon dates to the Late Viking Age (tenth to twelfth centuries), and rune stones are largely considered Christian monuments (e.g. Gräslund, 1991, 1992; Johansen, 1997: 159; Lager, 2002). There are around 4000 runic stone inscriptions known

from present-day Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, where more than 2200 of these are concentrated in the eastern part of Sweden including the counties of Uppland, Södermanland, and Östergötland. Of these counties Uppland alone has more than 1300 rune stones; many were erected during the late eleventh and early twelfth century (Gräslund, 1991, 1992; Zachrisson, 1998: 130). These stones belong to the second wave of erecting rune stones, when professional rock carvers entered the scene. It has been assumed that this second wave is more closely connected to the process of Christianisation, perhaps most strongly under the influence of Christian missionaries from the British Isles (Lager, 2002: 180–82).

Where were the rune stones erected? Jacobsen & Moltke (1942: 910–11) argue that the most common or proper place for Viking-age rune stones are linked to roads or routes, fairways, or along places where people travelled. This coincides with the thoughts of Ekholm (1950: 140) who likewise claims that rune stones are connected to communication networks on land and water. Ekholm further notes that rune stones may be raised near burial grounds, but stresses that the carved surface is turned towards the routes of travel by the burial grounds. The connection between the position of rune stones beside burial grounds (of various dates), roads, and routes, but also other features, have recently been highlighted by Lydia Klos (2009: 117, 343–44; see Larsson, 2010). It is also noteworthy that the locations were not haphazardly chosen along the routes, but located in places where different landscapes or routes met, or, to put it more simply, at crossroads. Such borders or crossroads were points of intersection that were given significance throughout the Iron Age in Scandinavia (e.g. Zachrisson, 1998; Wiker, 2000; Lindeberg, 2009). Occasionally, the inscriptions on the rune stones themselves declare that the stones were raised at crossroads, as on two rune stones in the county of Småland (Sm 45 and Sm 60). In her study of Late Viking-age rune stones in the Mälars valley and the county of Uppland in particular, Zachrisson (1998: 194) has concluded that these rune stones were mostly placed where different boundaries met, most specifically at property boundaries as well as at bridge crossings (see Lund, 2005 for bridge crossings). Crossroads inevitably entail slowing down and, when slowing down, encounters with rune stones and other features are prolonged. The rune stones' inscription and imagery themselves probably demanded of a person to slow down, or even stop, to engage with them, since rune stones, as images, affect and engage the beholder (Mitchell, 2005; Jones, 2007; Back Danielsson et al., 2012: 5–7). The places where rune stones were erected were probably also at times places and thresholds for different kinds of dwelling (Back Danielsson, 2015: 81). In sum, rune stones were commonly placed where people repeatedly walked, met, and travelled, which underlines the

fact that rune stones were part of commemorative practices that were performative and recurring in nature (Connerton, 1989).

Were the stones raised as a group, or standing in isolation? A rune stone was not erected alone, but, as Jacobsen and Moltke (1942: 998–99) have argued, was commonly just one part of a monument comprising several stones arranged in specific ways, as at Tystberga in Södermanland, Sweden (Figure 1). These arrangements could be stones standing in one or two rows, in circles, or as a ship setting. Other examples from the county of Södermanland in Sweden are the rune stones Sö 34 and 35, which frame a road in immediate connection with a river and an assembly place (Brate & Wessén, 1936). Indeed one of the stones declares that it stands at an assembly point (Brink, 2004: 309). Another example is the well-known Jarlabanke monument in the county of Uppland in Sweden (Figure 2), where several stones, both inscribed and uninscribed, are aligned on either side of a path or road (Snædal Brink, 1981: 129). Yet another illuminating example is the rune stone at Ängby in Lunda, also in Uppland, Sweden, which was found to constitute the centre of 14 flanking *bautas* (large uninscribed stones) (Ekholm, 1950: 138–39).

Having come thus far in this summary of the general characteristics of rune stones, including stones bearing *kuml* inscriptions (of which much more below), the following can be noted. Rune stones are associated with a variety of phenomena that include both human and non-human agency/agents. If we follow the thoughts of Barad, phenomena are created through intra-action with them. Again, intra-activity refers to how ‘discourse and matter are understood to be mutually constituted in the production of knowing’ (Barad, 2007: 149). The concepts used, as well as the apparatuses, create not only the phenomena we study, but also the matter. They (material and discourse) are intertwined (Barad, 2007: 141). Rune stones are thus created as phenomena and matter through the intra-action with a variety of agencies such as land, water, stones, imagery, humans, roads, and of course the runic inscriptions. These different discursive-material phenomena, human and non-human, together created or brought about the rune stones.

We will now look in greater detail at rune stones with *kuml* inscriptions. Although they share the general characteristics of the rune stones described above, they are also of special interest since the same word, *kuml*, was used for a variety of material appearances. Why would different materials have the same name and/or meaning?

KUML

The word *kuml* is found on several rune stones from the Scandinavian Late Viking Age. Stones with *kuml* inscriptions belong to both the early and the late phase of erecting rune stones, although the former are in the majority. The oldest known inscribed stone to carry the word *kuml* is probably the stone of Starup in Denmark (DR 17), which is dateable to around AD 750–900, and bears the inscription ‘airiks kubl’, meaning the *kuml* of Erik (Jacobsen & Moltke, 1942: 42–43, 676–77). One of the latest stones with the word *kuml* is in all probability the rune stone of Vester Marie 1 in Denmark (DR 383), which can be dated to the later part of the period, around AD 1050–1150. It must be concluded that the word *kuml* was used for several centuries — certainly before the appearance of the first inscription and then probably up to the present. Today, *kuml* means a pile of stones, a grave mound, and on nautical charts the Swedish word *kummel* (abbreviated as KL) refers to a pile of stones working as a navigation mark (Svenska Akademiens Ordlista, or SAOL, 1998).

When written on rune stones *kuml* could refer to different material expressions (Figures 1–4). It could be the rune stone itself, other stones without inscriptions arranged in specific ways in close proximity to the rune stone, or indeed a burial mound (e.g. Jacobsen & Moltke, 1942). Earlier research has debated what was meant by *kuml*, whether it referred to the rune stone, a (burial) mound, or other stones (see for example Nielsen, 1941 for a review of different researchers’ position from the seventeenth century onwards, and more recently Klos, 2009: 209–20). Brate & Wessén (1936: 270–71) conclude that it referred to stones, as in rune stones, but insist that the term *kuml* had a single, general meaning of a memorial sign. Nielsen (1941: 48–49) agrees with Brate & Wessén’s suggestions, while Johansen (1997: 186) and Köster (2014) suggest that *kuml* in general meant memorial or monument. While not disagreeing with the possibility that *kuml* could have had one single, general meaning, as a hypernym, I am interested in what *kuml* did or was supposed to do, as discourse, as expressed in different material appearances, and as performative practice. Furthermore, interpreting *kuml* in general terms as ‘monument’ and/or ‘memorial’ does little, in my view, to gain a deeper understanding of the concept of *kuml* and the phenomenon in action, and consequently aspects of Late Viking-age society. Following Barad, I would like to apprehend *kuml* as matter that did not have a fixed substance, and consequently that *kuml* was not a thing ‘...but a doing, a congealing of agency’ (Barad, 2007, p. 151, original emphasis). We shall now look more closely at the known *kuml* inscriptions.

In Scandinavia there are today 127 known rune stones with *kuml* inscriptions (Table 1). The *kuml* stones are found throughout Scandinavia, and can thus be said to be geographically widespread but with a certain emphasis on south-eastern Scandinavia. Some twenty-nine *kuml* stones are *in situ*, or are known to be in their original position (Table 1). When the places and surroundings of these stones are examined more closely, it becomes clear that the word *kuml* could refer to different material phenomena. They include standing stone(s) with runic inscription, standing stones without inscriptions, and/or referring to a mound or a cairn, as in the abode of the dead, as is sometimes the case. However, it is important to point out that these features were not necessarily raised or constructed at the same time as the rune stone inscription, but can be far older. For instance, the rune stone of Vålsta in Södermanland (Sö 47; Figure 4) stands on a cairn presumed to date to the Bronze Age (Burström, 1994). The rune stone of Skaftarp in Småland in Sweden (Sm 60) is raised on a cairn of unknown date and content. The cairn could be an abode for the dead or a cultivation cairn, or something else. Further, several rune stones have the word *kuml* in the plural form, meaning that what comprises the phenomenon of *kuml* involves several material appearances. Again, following Barad, these phenomena would intra-act to create a *kuml* ensemble. Whether these monuments were actually made by those who erected the rune stones, or whether they belonged to a distant or not so distant past, did not seem to matter.

THE CONCEPT OF *KUML*

A common phrase on a rune stone with *kuml* inscriptions would be along the lines: ‘...had these *kuml* made...’, or in the singular ‘...made this *kuml*...’. The plural form obviously points to the fact that what is referred to includes not only the rune stone with the *kuml* inscription, but also other features. In some instances the noun has been turned into a verb, as in ‘to *kuml*’ (Östergötland stone Ög 200) and to ‘be *kumled*’ (Östergötland stone Ög 174) (Peterson, 2006). Such use of the concept demonstrates that *kuml* can be connected to agency. Interestingly, there are also a few inscriptions dictating the sensations that should be aroused from the material phenomenon. The inscription ‘Enjoy the *kuml*!’ can be found on two Danish rune stones (DR 211 and DR 239; see Back Danielsson, 2015: 86). Seemingly therefore, *kuml* not only *is* (a concept), but *kuml* involves doing and becoming. But, as described above for rune stones, *kuml* had to intra-act to work. That is, *kuml* was brought about through performative intra-action with human(s), the stone(s), the inscription, a cairn, a mound, roads, further standing stones, and/or further non-human and human agents.

Interestingly, the word *kuml* is not used in later medieval writings, commonly held to reflect at least some instances of Viking Age societies, to any great extent. Sjöborg (1815: 5) remarks, for instance, that the older Edda usually uses the word *haug* (mound) for burials, instead of *kuml*. Hence it might be suggested that the material culture in the form of writings (texts in books) during medieval times did not have the capacity to bring about *kuml*. *Kuml* required other phenomena to be operational, but not exactly the same phenomena every time, since *kuml* could refer to a variety of non-human agents. Lastly, I will touch upon the question on why different entities shared the same name.

The renowned painter, sculptor, and ceramicist Hertha Hillfon (1921–2013) expressed the view that her works should not be named (Jonsson, 2015). The reason, she declared, was that a name could corrupt and disturb the unpredictable meeting between the work and the beholder. Thus, a name may bring with it preconceived ideas on a variety of levels that steer someone’s experience of something —the art work in this instance — and the quality of the experience in specific directions. I argue that giving different material phenomena the same name, *kuml*, does exactly that: it offers predictability and establishes the same or similar relations between different phenomena. Such a procedure can be called an ‘agential cut’ in Baradian terms (Barad, 2003), in the sense that specific practices of mattering are (temporarily) excluded, while others are included. Through specific intra-actions both boundaries and properties of what is included in the phenomena become determined, and specific embodied concepts become meaningful (Barad, 2003: 815). It is important to point out that the cut makes a connection and makes things come both together and apart, and that cuts are ongoing and continuously enacted (Barad, 2007: 179). Of course, as a researcher, I too have made a cut through my focus on rune stones, especially those with *kuml* inscriptions. What kind of practices of mattering could have been included in the case of *kuml* during the Scandinavian Late Iron Age?

***KUML* AS ‘CUT’**

A possible common denominator for the different material phenomena that *kuml* came in concerns transitions and transformations, and safe guidance during such circumstances. *Kuml* meaning graves — as in, for instance, mounds or cairns — may be described as the material remains of transitional events. A once living person has died and a funeral has taken place, transferring the person from the land of the living to the land of the dead. Such a transfer and transformation may be said to aid both the deceased and the living. Rune stones are material manifestations of similar transformations and transitions too, since they were commonly

raised in memory of a deceased person. Further, human beings moved in a shifting landscape, where the rune stones can be described as signalling the entrances and exits to new worlds — ports, courts, farmyards, burial grounds, new roads, paths, etc. But rune stones were also connected to other transitional events. Not only were they thresholds or gates to different parts of the landscape, but veritable transformers, highlighting the following processes: the change from heathen to Christian practices, from alive to dead to ancestor, the passing of arable land from one generation to the next, the movement from earthly realms to celestial realms, etc. (Back Danielsson, 2007: 167 with references). The category of other standing stones (also named *kuml*), arranged in specific ways in the landscape, likewise acted as guides in the landscape. Thus it can be argued that *kuml* focused on bodily journeys and passages at spiritual as well as spatial levels, in which the variety of *kuml* worked as helpers, enunciators, and navigators for both living and dead human beings. Importantly, the material phenomena were to offer safe guidance during such journeys and passages (Back Danielsson, 2015: 87). In this capacity, the qualitative experience they produced together with other non-human agents and those encountering them was intended to create a sensation of safety. This sensation also produced positive cultural value (Back Danielsson, 2015; see Munn, 1986). Despite the suggestion, put forward here, that the outcome of intra-activity of the *kuml* phenomenon was known and familiar, or at least desirable, it must be emphasised that *kuml* was in constant and continuous being and becoming, and as such did not have a fixed substance.

CONCLUSIONS

In this short article I have discussed the material phenomenon of rune stones, and specifically rune stones with *kuml* inscriptions, through Barad's concept of intra-action and agential cut. *Kuml* could refer to different material phenomena such as rune stones with a *kuml* inscription, other un-inscribed stones in the vicinity of a rune stone, or a mound/cairn, as in the abode of the dead. Following Barad, a *kuml*, all the different entities that make up a *kuml*, and a norm are co-produced where no element can precede the other (see Alberti & Marshall, 2014: 20). Specifically, *kuml* could be understood as discursive-material phenomena where a variety of human and non-human agencies, such as land, water, stones, inscriptions, etc. intra-acted and brought about *kuml*. Barad's concept of intra-action allows us to take ontological questions into consideration, and gives us an opportunity to understand and articulate a world that is entangled. A singular focus on the *kuml* material alone does not recognise that *kuml* was a performative practice, where the different agencies intra-acted and became an ensemble, a

phenomenon termed *kuml*. The way the concept was used during the Late Viking Age also lends itself to a Baradian approach to the material. *Kuml* was in some instances used as a verb (to *kuml*, or to be *kumled*). *Kuml* was an enactment, the result of different material-discursive practices (Barad, 2007:145–46). By using different means of engagement with the complex, temporal, and material world it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of its past and how it exists in the present (Fowler & Harris, 2015: 145). Consequently, the inclusion of more theory allows and recognises new dynamic versions of the Viking world, and enables us to develop research strands in mortuary behaviour and commemoration.

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Pour une approche plus théorique dans l'étude des pratiques funéraires de l'époque viking

Le thème de ce numéro spécial donne l'occasion d'illustrer maints exemples de nouvelles approches dans le traitement de la mort et de la mémoire dans le monde viking. Bien que toutes les contributions démontrent qu'il existe une multitude de nouveaux moyens d'étudier les contextes funéraires, en grande partie axés sur les différentes formes de citation impliquant la culture matérielle et les monuments, cet article se concentre sur une dimension qui n'a pas été abordée ici. Il s'agit de la façon dont les approches concernant la citation mortuaire pourraient aussi faire usage des théories post-humanistes afin de mieux comprendre les pratiques funéraires du monde viking. L'article traite de façon succincte les pierres runiques, en particulier les pierres runiques portant des inscriptions figurant le terme

kuml. *Le terme kuml figure sur des pierres runiques contemporaines et se réfère à des entités matérielles diverses, telles que les pierres runiques, les tertres/cairns et d'autres pierres dressées. La formation et l'existence de kuml en tant que concept sont brièvement évoquées à travers les notions d'intra-action et de réalisme agential avancées par Karen Barad.*

Translation by Madeleine Hummler

Mots-clés : Epoque viking, pierres runiques, *kuml*, Barad, intra-action, « agential cuts »

Mehr Theorie in der Erforschung der Grabsitten in der Welt der Wikinger

Das Thema dieser Spezialausgabe gibt die Gelegenheit, zahlreiche Beispiele von neuen Ansätzen in der Erforschung des Todes und der Erinnerung in der Welt der Wikinger vorzustellen. Während alle Beiträge zeigen, dass es viele neue und aussichtsvolle Ansätze — die den Schwerpunkt auf Formen der materiellen Zitierung und auf Denkmäler legen — in der Forschung über Grabbefunde gibt, wird im vorliegenden Artikel eine andere Dimension, die anderswo nicht behandelt wird, kurz besprochen. Es handelt sich um die Frage, ob die Zitierung der Toten auch post-humanistische Theorien nützen könnte, um die Grabsitten der Wikingerwelt besser zu verstehen und weiter zu entwickeln. In diesem kurzen Artikel werden die Runensteine, besonders die Runensteine mit kuml Inschriften. Der Begriff kuml taucht auf zeitgenössischen Runensteinen vor; der Begriff bezieht sich auf verschiedene materielle Entitäten, wie Runensteine, Grabhügel oder Hügel und andere aufrecht stehende Steine. Das Sein und das Werden des kumls als Konzept werden hier durch die Begriffe der Intra-Aktion und des agentiellen Realismus von Karen Barad kurz besprochen. Translation by Madeleine Hummler

Stichworte: Wikingerzeit, Runensteine, *kuml*, Barad, Intra-Aktion, „agential cuts“

TABLE 1
RUNE-STONES WITH *KUML* INSCRIPTIONS KNOWN FROM SCANDINAVIA

COUNTRY/COUNTY	RUNE-STONE NUMBER	TOTAL
Södermanland (Sö)	18, 46, 88, 116, 143, 174, 281, FV1948:289	
at original location	47, 103, 173, 296, 319	13 stones
Öland (Öl)	6, 10, 27, 37, 52, Köping 40, ATA4064/60C	
at original location	0 (zero)	7 stones
Uppland (U)	4, 585, 620, 649b, 1066	
at original location	323, 616, 735	8 stones
Östergötland (Ög)	8, 40, 65, 73, 75, 89, 94, 131, 139, 154, 160, 174, 200, 220, 229, 231, 1958:252, FV1970;310, FV1965;54, HOV34;28; SKL1:174, ATA322-165-2006B, NOR2000;35	
at original location	29, N267	25 stones
Västergötland (Vg)	67, 100, 101, 103, 106, 118, 119E, 125, 171, 176	
at original location	115, 168, 169, 194	14 stones
Småland (Sm)	9, 16A, 27, 40, 46, 65, 113, 121, 126, 163\$, SVS1973	
at original location	13, 32, 35, 36, 37, 45, 60, 62, 138, 139, 142, 143	23 stones
Denmark (DR)	2, 4, 17, 30, 36, 41, 55, 56, 81, 106, 110, 133, 143, 211, 219, 239, 271, 293, 294, 318, 337, 370, 383, EM85:221	
at original location	42, 209, 277	27 stones
Gotland (G)	72, 80, 94, 138, 203, 252, 343	7 stones
Närke (Nä)	3	1 stone
Gästrikland (Gs)	19	1 stone
Norway	300	1 stone
TOTAL		127 stones